

**Testimony of the Rev. Jeff Liebmann, Minister of the Unitarian Universalist
Fellowship of Midland before the House Commerce Committee on
December 3, 2014 in regards to HB 5804**

I am not a physician, so I will not address the conclusions of every major medical association that sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are predominately determined by genetics. I am not a law enforcement officer, so I will not cite the alarming statistics of violence against gays and transgender individuals. I am not a social worker, so I will not share examples of their mistreatment, bullying, and abuse often leading to suicide.

As a minister, however, I have studied many sacred texts. Many religions around the world love and accept gays and transgender individuals as they are and respect their inherent worth and dignity as the creations of god. But since the audience in Michigan is largely Christian, let me address passages from the Bible relevant to the bills under consideration.

1. The few passages that appear to address homosexuality fall into three categories. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for the unforgivable sin of inhospitality to strangers. When the men angrily gather outside Lot's home, their intent is not to engage in loving, consensual sex, but violent rape. Since no one advocates rape, this story bears no relevance on the rights of anyone.
2. The Priestley Code of Leviticus was a harsh list of rules imposed on the Jews in exile in Babylon as a way of preserving Jewish culture, and especially to ensure the growth of the Jewish population. So, the proscription against men lying with other men is about the Jews need to increase their population, which is certainly not an issue in the modern world.
3. Paul's references are each made in the context of many deviant behaviors, which happen to include an array of sexual practices not representative of our modern understanding of two adults who love each other and want to live together as a family.

In regards to transgender inclusion, in Genesis God took a rib from Adam and made that rib -- that male rib -- into a woman. Therefore, it was God who performed the first gender transformation by altering male tissue into female. The Lord's creation of woman from man emphasizes the close connection between gender identity and the permanent, loving attraction humans feel toward each other not possible in the animal kingdom.

And in Galatians, Paul tells us it is faith, not action that makes us heirs to God's promise of salvation. "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female..." Paul is telling us that the Mosaic Law only mattered until Jesus arrived and died for our sins. Therefore, God welcomes and protects us regardless of our ethnicity, our social status, or our gender, then so should we.